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ABSTRACT

Suggesting that ills said to be perpetrated by advertising are really attributes of a unified field of consciousness, this paper discusses the concept that advertising creates desire. The generally undisputed notion that advertising helps to create specific desires is distinguished from the criticism that advertising increases the level and decreases the quality of generalized "desire". The nature of desire is discussed as a component of the metaphysical perspective of the Eastern philosophical tradition of the Veda. From this perspective, it is argued that: (1) "desire" is fundamental to all aspects of creation and cannot be created or increased; (2) the quality of specific desires is a function of a pervasive unified field of human consciousness, the existence of which has recently been posited from psychophysiological research; and (3) the quality of advertising products and services, consumers' propensities, and advertising itself is delimited by the quality of the unified field. The summary notes that the unified field of consciousness concept opens up a new avenue for dialogue in advertising theory, one where commonality can be found for integrating various discourses on the relation of advertising to consumers' desires and to the quality of life in society as a whole. References are included. (JD)

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ADVERTISING, DESIRE, AND THE UNIFIED FIELD:
A metaphysical perspective on advertising

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the theme prevalent in commentaries on advertising that advertising creates desire. A distinction is made between the generally undisputed notion that advertising participates in the creation of specific desires and the criticism of advertising that it increases the level and decreases the quality of generalized Desire. The nature of desire and description of its quality is then discussed as a component of the metaphysical perspective of the Eastern philosphical tradition of the Veda. From this perspective, the point is argued that Desire cannot be created or increased, as it is fundamental to creation in all its aspects. It is also argued that the quality of specific desires is a function of a pervasive unified field of human consciousness, the existence of which has recently been posited from psychopysiological research. From the Vedic perspective, the quality of advertised products and services, consumers' propensities and advertising itself is delimited by the quality of the unified field.

* * *

ADVERTISING, DESIRE AND THE UNIFIED FIELD:
A metaphysical perspective on advertising

Theory in advertising is blessed with several philosophies about the nature and function of advertising. There are Advertising as Information, Advertising as Communication, Advertising as Persuasion, Advertising as Economic Lubricant, etc. Most writers, practitioners and educators of advertising probably have a pet philosophy that guides their work, whether explicitly or implicitly.

One such theory, perhaps one of the oldest, appears to find favor with advocates and critics alike. It is the notion that advertising creates desire. Practitioners cite this as a desideratum, critics as a social evil, possibly because both see the desire as central to advertising. The difference in their attitudes toward advertising stems from differing perspectives on the role of desire in social and psychological realms. This makes advertising as ethically controversial as sex, since advertising is rather closely kin to the soul of sexuality: both express, dwell on, are concerned with desire.

Desire is not a new concept in the literature of advertising theory. Advertising's role in creating desires is a theme in early advertising theory. It appears in the work of Walter Dill Scott from the early 1900's, reflecting the recent discoveries in the budding science of psychology, where he recommends replacing appeals to consumer's physical needs with appeals to consumer's psychological wants and emotions as the principal avenue of

creating desire for goods and services. (In Cherington, 1903)

The theme persists into the present. Stuart Ewen implicates advertising's ability to create desires in Captains of Consciousness (1976) to support his general thesis that advertising is a capitalist conspiracy to promote consumption by manipulating the populace for the benefit of industrialists. He says:

> Transcendence of traditional consumer markets and buying habits required people to buy, not to satisfy their own fundamental needs, but rather to satisfy the real, historic needs of capitalist productive machinery. (Ewen, p. 35)

The implication here is that advertising plays on superficial, artificially created needs. He quotes Carl Naether for support on the condemnation of "fancied needs" advertising creates in the consuming masses. In Advertising and Social Change (1981) Ronald Berman amply discussed several objections to this notion of consumption as a conspiratory, evil perpetration. To these, I'd like to add two.

First, Ewen makes the mistake, perhaps an easy one for a social-political historian, of describing social action as the expression of a faceless mass, rather than of autonomous, or at least semi-autonomous, individuals. "Capitalist machinery" replaces individual merchants, and "the masses" or "the populace" or "the consumers" replace individuals acting in their perceived self-interest. This naive view of the nature and activity of "the masses" has been adequately scrutinized and dispelled by Merton, Friedson, Blumler (1968, 1954, 1946) and others. The

posture is unsupportable for a contemporary theorist, though it was understandably appealing to scholars from the turn of the century.

Apparently, the naive perception in early advertising and marketing theory was that the consumer is easily manipulated by techniques derived from the new social sciences. Cherington (1920, pp 311, 325) confidently announced the end of the era of "guesswork" in advertising in 1920, due to the triumph of the analytic method and mass statistics. This theme of consumer control recurs with each new advance in social scientific technique: witness the flap surrounding the era of motivational research in the 1950s. Nevertheless, a writer with some appreciation of the pragmatics of advertising would not make such claims for its infallibility and potency, even in general terms, after witnessing the obstinance and fickleness of the consumer in his purchasing behaviour and belief patterns (Katona 1964).

The second problem with the "fancied needs" argument is that Ewen's view of advertisers as manipulators (captains) of consciousness assumes that the traditional, pre-industrial level of consumption was "natural" and the level inspired by advertising is artificially created. The increase in consumption is thus attributed to the overpowering success of persuasive advertising techniques.

It has been argued that the same heightened level of consumption could be attributed to an inherent propensity in humans, uninstigated by external forces, to increase gratification until some barrier is reached--saturation or limits

of supply. In this argument, advertising's success in manipulating the populace is perceived as directing consumer's attention to products or services that are available for consumption. Consumption in general is not increased by advertising, though consumption of some particular product or service may be. As Archibald Foster (1974) noted, the derivation of the word advertising accurately presents its meaning--to advert, to turn the mind towards. In this perspective, advertising is a navigator--it points; the real captain of consciousness is the consumer himself, who decides whether to follow. In this view, no goad is needed to promote consumption, since strong propensity already exists.

This picture of the post-industrial consumer compelled by the instinct to consume can be rather unflattering--one of a crazed dinosaur gorging himself into a stupor, his only restraints being exhausted supply or glutted overindulgence. It is an image of decadent Rome or Versaille; unfortunately an image that may be held by much of the Third World, as well as critics of our capital system and perhaps some of our allies. Such a view of our society, and of advertising as a highly visible part of it, presents a target for strong criticism even from within, and particularly from Marxist trained historians and political scientists.

The roots of this prejudice against preoccupation with worldly possessions and gratifications may well stem from ancient traditions in Western philosophy and theology, for example, the Epicureans and early Christians. Thus the word "desire" comes to

us loaded with value significances and connotations. This attitude is also compounded by more recent philosophical postures--naturalism and liberal socio-political theory.

A key distinction in the discussion of commercial consumption lies between Desire in general and specific desires, paralleling Kroeber-Riel's distinction (1979) between Tonic and Phasic activation, with Tonic activation refering to general arousal of the nervous system and Phasic refering to specific, short-term arousals. It is generally conceded that advertising influences consumer demand for specific products and services. Clearly, many products could not have succeeded in the marketplace without advertising support. What is not clear is whether this influence, or "management of demand" as Galbraith (1967) calls it, can be responsible for increasing Desire in general. This is the accusation of moralists who hold that advertising is a spur to materialist desires, turning people away from more wholesome, spiritual values and most importantly, a natural state of tranquility--in short, that advertising is the apple on which contemporary Eve is munching.

I contend that there is a hidden error in the venerable notion of advertising creating desire--in the view that otherwise content, spiritually serene men and women are whipped into dissatisfaction with their lives and virtuous aspirations by advertising--that is, that advertising creates desire where desire otherwise does not exist. I challenge this view of advertising's effect on consumers with the thesis that advertising makes products and services desirable without having

the effect of increasing the level of generalized Desire. My thesis is that advertising is the intermediary by which generalized Desire is actualized into specific desires. It is a part of the process by which Desire actualizes.

What, then, is this platonic construct "Desire"? This paper addresses this question from the perspective of a philosophical tradition generally thought to embody the strongest critique of human desire--the Eastern philosophy that produced the traditions of yogis and gurus. This argument, contrary to expectations, starts from the premise that Desire is a natural, essential, inherent human trait. Its origins are the origins of life itself and the source of life, be it deity or some force of nature.

In this presentation I will argue that Advertising is an expression of that Desire, a manifestation of natural instinct. It is a part, not an enemy, of human nature and of Nature itself; that the consumer is not resting in serene equilibrium which is shaken by advertising. The consumer would not be in equilibrium if advertising ceased or had never existed. The essence of life and growth is disequilibrium--a dynamic, search for fulfillment. Thus, advertising is an essential component of the growth of human society at this stage in its development.

Can a bonafide metaphysic support such a view, encompassing the origins of creation on one hand and a mundanity such as advertising on the other? I believe there is--a journey to the East may prove fruitful.

DESIRE AND VEDIC PHILOSOPHY

Why go to Eastern philosophy for the basis of this paper?

Because it is probable that no one writing in advertising theory has looked there yet, thus missing some useful inspirations. Emerson, Buber and several substantial names in nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy in America and Europe found something there; we may, too. Pierce, Cronen and Harris (1982) note in their review of human communication theory the exclusion of Eastern thought in their work due to the lack of contribution to the field from this quarter. It is not due to impotency of Eastern thought that this is so, but rather that the journey to the East has apparently not been made to seek this contribution. This paper offers a partial remedy to this on behalf of advertising theory as a part of human communication theory. Where the older philosophies can help us understand our world is by explaining why nature's laws exist as they do and how they are connected to larger contexts than science can directly study, that is, for their metaphysical perspective.

This paper argues for advertising's place in the structure of existence from the perspective of the Eastern philosophy called Veda, a tradition whose origins date in its written form from the period circa 500 B.C. and presumably centuries older in its oral tradition.*

Veda supports the view that all activities in the Universe

* Footnote: The paper proceeds on the assumption that interpretation of texts, passages, and concepts from the Eastern literature cited is individualistically interpreted, since substantial controversy is possible on the scholastic validity of any interpretation. Therefore, the paper is not to be taken as a scholastic commentary on Eastern thought, rather its value is in the sense of the arguments as they appeal to the reader.

are subject to certain abstract natural laws. Therefore, we are able to study advertising as an expression of natural laws, connected to other similar laws.

Often metaphysical discussions revolve around a hypothesized "unseen" force. If the force is a diety, then the discussion is theological in nature. Much of traditional Western metaphysics is in this vein. Vedic philosophy, too, has a theory of unseen forces that are "greater than physical," hence meta-physic. However, the Vedic perspective is not theosophical, since the metaphysic does not rest on the postulate of a diety. The unseen forces of the Veda are principles or Laws of Nature. When named, these names do not necessarily represent personal names, though they have come to be viewed by the religiously minded as dieties. With this in mind, I will try to present an abbreviated picture of the Vedic view of several of these primary principles. Then from this perspective more mundane matters, such as advertising, can be seen as fitting a larger scheme--and advertising will have its metaphysic.

Here are some brief precepts:

1. The source of creation is complete in itself, physically unmanifest, and the home of all natural law. Being complete, it has no needs, though its capacity for unbounded fulfillment admits wanting to experience this potential for

fulfillment. It creates phenomonological existence out of itself to satisfy a desire, though not a need, for increased fulfillment. This is a paradoxical point--the Full becoming more full--but is an essential component of Vedic cosmology.

2. The Universe is created through the actualization of natural laws. Thus, the origin and nature of creation is Desire expressed through natural laws. (Mahesh 1978)

3. There are three fundamental principles, or laws, that underlie all of creation, called the three gunas. These principles are found to be present in any part or aspect of creation, in lesser or greater proportion. They are Sattwa: growth, knowledge; Rajas: energy, life-sustaining activity; and Tamas: decay, ignorance, torpor. The gunas can be used as a mode of analysis for any situation in creation, much as three vectors can be employed to define a point moving through space. (Prabhavananda and Isherwood)

These precepts suggest the following:

1. Desire is a fundamental attribute of creation, since creation is the means by which Desire is actualized.

2. All aspects of creation are means for Desire to actualize, since Desire actualizes through creation of specific desires.

3. Desire is subject to the influences of the three gunas, thus Desire can have a growth-promoting influence, a life-sustaining influence or a life-destroying influence.

From these general propositions, specific propositions pertaining to advertising can be made:

1. Advertising, as an aspect of creation, is a means for Desire to become actualized through specific desires.

2. Advertising is inherently a mixture of life promoting, sustaining and decaying principles, depending on the predominance of each guna.

3. In essence, advertising is qualitatively neutral, but can be actualized as positive, neutral or negative.

The relation of individual consumers to advertising can be delineated:

1. The principal force moving individuals to activity is similar to that which moves creation--desire for fulfillment.

2. The desire for fulfillment is inherent in individuals, thus cannot be created by advertising.

3. This generalized desire actualizes in individuals through

creation of specific desires.

4. By presenting a product or service to an individual in such a manner as to make it desirable, specific desires can be promoted in individuals.

5. A product or service can only be made desirable to an individual in context of an existing psychological frame of reference in the individual which makes the product and the presentation in the advertisement salient (psychologically significant.)

6. Thus, there are three criteria for creation of specific desires by advertising: product salience, ad salience and consumer mind set or propensity.

Products or services, advertisements, and consumer propensities all can be analyzed in terms of the three gunas. However, in a sense these are intertwined to an extent that they cannot be completely separated for analysis. Consumer propensities are partly molded by exposure to advertising. Advertising is affected by the nature of the product it represents. Products are made available that the producer hopes will satisfy consumer desires. Thus, responsibility for what specific desires consumers actualize is not directly attributable to these factors individually and separately, but in concert.

From the perspective of Veda, there is an explanation for

the quality of each of these three interrelated factors--product, advertisement and consumer propensities. The posited factor that determines the quality of human endeavor is a unified field of consciousness, analogous to the electromagnetic field which Physics theorizes as the ground in which matter actualizes. It is not merely an arithmetic aggregate, but an independent unity, a universal consciousness in which each individual shares and by which the possible quality of individual consciousness is delimited. This view is similar to the Brotherhood-of-Man, Jungian unconscious theories of Western psychology and theology. Veda posits this field as an active influence in human consciousness, where the quality of this field in terms of the gunas is a factor in human decision-making.

Thus, this view indicates that the quality of products, advertising, and consumer propensities are a function of a larger, pervasive value--the state of the unified field of consciousness.

Several propositions suggest themselves:

1. The quality of products, advertising, and consumer propensities will not improve substantially unless the unified field changes.

2. As individuals are influenced by the unified field, individuals can influence the unified field, albeit to a miniscule extent.

3. Significant social change requires the efforts of a number of individuals working to change the unified field.

4. Since individual effects on the unified field are marginal, an appropriate technology needs to be explored that will have significant effects on the unified field.

5. An appropriate technology would have to include knowledge of what individual efforts affect the field and how many individuals are needed to make the effect significant.

Fortunately, besides expounding the theoretical proposition of a unified field, the Vedic tradition also embodies a technology for changing the unified field. Though this technology has been dormant for centuries, it has been revived in recent years to be explored and tested by contemporary scientific methods.

Such a radical theory would be untenable without some empirical evidence to suppot it. Experiments have been run to test these techniques, and although the body of evidence and explanatory theory is not complete, the work to date appears promising. Recently, reports on research investigating the existence of a field of consciousness have appeared in Neuroscience and the International Journal of Neuroscience by Dillbeck and Bronson, Orme-Johnson and Haynes, and Orme-Johnson, et al. (1982, 1981, 1981) The ability of individuals to

influence this hypothesized field through concerted group effort has also been researched and the results reported to the American Psychological Association by Aron and Aron in 1981. These reports indicate the possibility of such a field as the Veda suggests, the ability of concerted group effort to affect the field, and theorize the effect that changes in the field have on the general population.

These pioneer reports suggest a new line of thought on the question of advertising's relation to the quality of consumers desires. They suggest that advertising is not the major determinant of the quality of consumer desires, or of the quality of products offered. Advertising is probably subject to the same restricting influences as those experienced by consumers and producers--the quality of the unified field. Thus, to improve the quality of advertising, consumer propensities and products in respect to their degree of life-promoting and sustaining influence, the field must first be changed.

SUMMARY

The perspective introduced in this paper suggests that the ills said to be perpetrated by advertising are not political or economic in origin, but rather are attributes of a more fundamental strata of social reality which pervades social, economic and political behavior--a unified field of consciousness. This opens up a whole new field of dialogue in advertising

theory, one derived from a metaphysical perspective, where commonality can be found for integrating these various discourses on the relation of advertising to consumers' desires and to the quality of life in the society as a whole.

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